

Viewpoint 5, rural with residential, looks east from SR 99 between Avenue 72 and Avenue 76 near Pixley (Figure 13; Figure 11 shows the location of the viewpoint). Isolated single family residential uses as well as single family residential communities populate the Sacramento to Bakersfield region. Pictured here is a typical residential subdivision. The photograph is taken from the west side of SR 99 and shows the view to the east. In the foreground is the unpaved shoulder of the roadway, as well as a chain link fence likely delineating the road right-of-way. Beyond the fence is a dirt trail that could be used for pedestrian and/or bicycle use. The middle ground contains an open field of short grasses. In the background are single story residences oriented towards a street that is perpendicular to SR 99. Wood plank fencing separates back yards from the open field.

Figure 13
Viewpoint 5: Rural with Residential Uses, Pixley



Viewpoint 6: Vegetated Setting

A vegetated typology is characterized by natural vegetation as compared with landscape features. The periphery of water bodies (lakes, streams, or runoff areas) usually contain natural vegetation. Potential crossings of Dry Creek, Stanislaus River, and Tuolumne River, among others, have been identified.

This viewpoint is elevated since it is from the road overcrossing (Figure 15; Figure 14 shows the location of the viewpoint). This viewpoint looks southwest from Road 29 overcrossing of Avenue 12 near Madera. Because the viewpoint is from a road overcrossing, the foreground is not at ground level. The viewpoint contains an elevated view of riparian vegetation and tree canopies on either side of the 10- to 20-foot wide stream. Thirty to forty-foot tall trees lie on either side of the banks of the stream. The riparian vegetation is about 10 to 15 feet high and dense. The middle ground contains double track rail lines on concrete pilings, two of which are visible in the middle ground. SR 99 is visible in the background and roughly parallels the rail corridor in this area. Beyond SR 99 lie a barn, warehouse, and open fields.

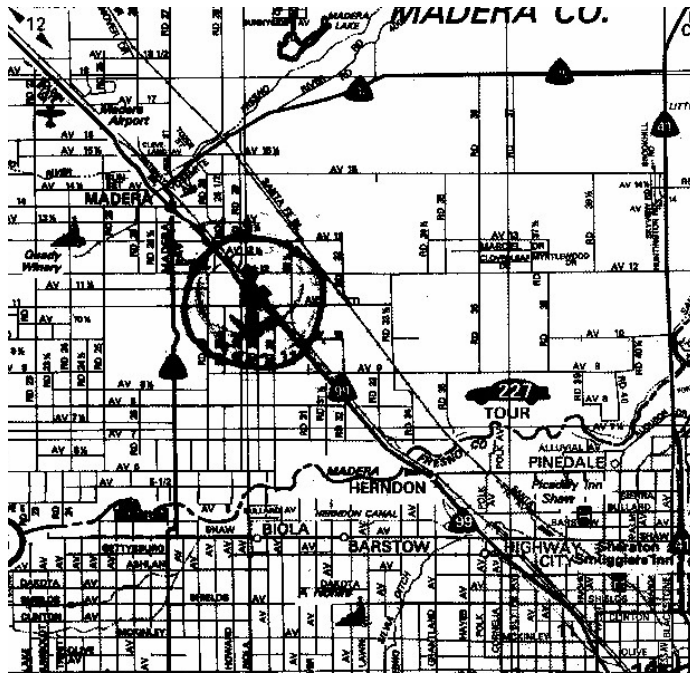


Figure 14
Location of Viewpoint 6: Madera

Figure 15
Viewpoint 6: Rural with Vegetated Setting, Madera



3.0 METHODOLOGY FOR VISUAL ANALYSIS

The visual resource analysis for this program-level EIR/EIS is focused on a broad comparison of potential impacts to visual resources (particularly scenic resources or sensitive viewing areas) along corridors for each of the alternatives (high-speed train and modal alternatives) and around stations. The potential impacts for each of these alternatives are compared with the No-Project Alternative.

Because the region covers a number of different types of landscapes over a large geographic area (open-rural landscape, highly vegetated natural area, densely developed urban landscape, open barren landscape, etc), a typology of landscapes is used to characterize the landscapes in the region that are within ¼ mile of the alternative corridors and stations. An example of each type of landscape is described in terms of the foreground, middle ground and background dominant features that make up its distinguishable color, texture, line, and form. The typology includes landscapes that are particularly scenic in the region, as well as landscapes that are typical. This makes up the baseline existing conditions against which the analysis of change or impact for each of the alternatives is compared. Photographs of the existing features for each of six landscapes illustrate the dominant line, form, color and texture for that landscape type. The viewing points for each photograph of each landscape type are shown on Thomas Brothers map pages (Figures 5, 7, 9, 11, and 14).

The summary tables for the region identify the presence or amount of scenic/visual resources within the ¼ mile study area for each of the corridors and around station sites for the High-Speed Train Alternative, and along highway corridors and around airports for the Modal Alternative.

Photorealistic images of the build alternatives are then digitally superimposed onto representative landscape photographs to illustrate if, and how, the dominant visual features that characterize the landscape would change if the alternative were implemented. Selected elevations have also been identified and are included in this section to amplify the description of potential impacts. Of particular concern are elevated structures (guideways or overpasses). Also of concern are the potential shadow effect of elevated structures and the light and glare effects of the alternatives. These changes, or visual impacts, are described and ranked as high, medium, or low in the summary table according to the potential change to scenic visual resources. Contrast rankings are defined as follows:

- High – Project features are very obvious and are a dominant part of the view.
- Medium – Project features are readily discernible, but do not dominate the view.
- Low – Project features are consistent with the line, form, texture and color of other elements in the view and do not stand out from other elements of the view.

Rankings of potential shadow impacts are defined as follows:

- High – Residential or park uses have been identified adjacent to the alignment or station
- Medium – Residential or park uses have been identified within the vicinity of the alignment or station
- Low – Residential or park uses are not likely to occur in the vicinity of the alignment or station
- None – No effects could occur due to the proposed design of the alignment or station

CEQA criteria for significant visual impacts include whether the project alternative would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings?
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

Each of the CEQA criteria is considered in the ranking of potential impacts.

4.0 VISUAL IMPACTS

4.1 NO-PROJECT ALTERNATIVE

The No Build/No Action Alternative involves only those transportation improvements that have been programmed and funded. They include localized changes to the transportation system – a new or improved interchange, installation of carpool or high occupancy lanes, selective highway widenings, expansions of airport passenger terminals and parking, and track and station upgrades on the conventional passenger rail system. Given the nature of these improvements, the impacts to visual resource would be somewhat limited. However, this alternative would result in greater environmental impact than the HST Alternative because the HST Alternative would be geographically limited. Compared to the more extensive Modal Alternative, the No Build/No Action Alternative would trigger less environmental impact. It is anticipated that collectively the various improvements programmed and funded in the State Transportation Improvement Program, Regional Transportation Plans, Airport Master Plans, and intercity passenger rail plans would have impacts, many of which will require mitigation measures to reduce the effects.

Impacts of the No Build/No Action Alternative would be expected both during the construction period and during the long-term operational period. The effects would occur throughout the Sacramento to Bakersfield region, primarily along the highways where the majority of the funded and programmed improvements are proposed, and at two of the region's airports, Sacramento Metropolitan and Fresno Yosemite International. With respect to the roadway improvements, visual resource impacts would be greatest in those segments proposed for interchanges:

- SR 99 at Elkhorn Boulevard, Riego Road, Elverta, Route 20, and I-5 (Sacramento County)
- Route 70 at Algodon, Feather River (Sacramento County)
- SR 99 south interchange improvements at Grant Line Road, Sheldon Road, and Walnut Avenue (Sacramento County)
- I-5 and Road 102, Richards Boulevard, El Camino, I-80, and Cosumnes River Boulevard (Sacramento County)
- I-5 at North Market Boulevard, Bannon Street, and Northgate Boulevard and at Spa Road (Sacramento County)
- SR 99 – Sandy Mush Interchange (Merced County)
- SR 99 – Arboleda Interchange (Merced County)
- SR 99 – Campus/Healy Interchange (Merced County)
- SR 99 – Westside Boulevard (Merced County)
- SR 99 – Sultana Interchange (Merced County)
- SR 99 – Grantland Avenue Diagonal (Fresno County)

Impacts that would be expected include:

- in areas with vegetation or streams, loss of scenic resources;
- in areas with sensitive receptors, loss of view corridors; and
- shading from elevated interchange construction.

The above impacts are expected to occur whether or not the project build alternatives are constructed and implemented. Each of the proposed intercity travel demand improvements of the No Build/No Action Alternative has been or will be subject to its own environmental clearance process and potential mitigation measures will be identified as part of those individual CEQA and/or NEPA reviews to address substantial impacts.

4.2 MODAL ALTERNATIVE

The Modal Alternative involves both those transportation improvements that have been programmed and funded, as well as other improvements that have simply been identified, whether in local, regional or state plans. They include localized changes to the transportation system – new or improved interchanges, installation of carpool or high occupancy lanes, highway widenings, expansions of airport passenger terminals and parking, and track and station upgrades on the conventional passenger rail system. Given the nature of these improvements (i.e., within existing corridors and facilities), the impacts to visual resource would be areally limited and unlikely to result in substantial changes to the visual setting. They would not be expected to contrast noticeably with the existing landscape typologies nor result in shade effects. In addition, none of the roadway modifications proposed by the Modal Alternative would affect scenic corridors or scenic viewing points (see Table 2). The various improvements programmed and funded in the State Transportation Improvement Program, Regional Transportation Plans, Airport Master Plans, and intercity passenger rail plans, as well as those improvements simply identified, would have impacts, many of which will require mitigation measures to reduce the effects.

4.3 HIGH-SPEED TRAIN ALTERNATIVE

4.3.1 Change to Landscape Typologies

Urban Impacts

As described above for the Sacramento to Bakersfield region, the urban settings are exemplified by the downtowns along the rail corridors. Figure 16 shows the elevation for the proposed Bakersfield Truxtun Station, and Figure 17 shows a representative photo-simulation of an urban HST station.

The existing stations are generally one to two stories in height or about 15 to 20 feet tall. The new stations would generally be about 40 to 50 feet tall. Pedestrian overcrossings allowing pedestrians to access either side of the tracks would be about 60 to 80 feet tall (about 6-8 stories high). New parking structures would also be constructed in the station vicinity.

Existing stations would no longer be a dominant feature in each view. Impacts that could occur include incompatibility with existing design and scale of the nearby build environment and incompatibility with the historic character of specific stations. The level of impact would depend on the sensitivity of the location, for example, a high quality setting at a gateway to the local area.

Industrial Impacts

Some new stations would be constructed within and alongside existing stations in an industrial setting. This could include at existing station sites, as well as at industrial areas along the rail corridors.

Table 1
Sacramento to Bakersfield Region – Potential Visual Resources Impacts

	Scenic Corridors (1) Impacted	Scenic Viewing Points/Overlooks Within 1/4 Mile	High Contrast Impacts	Shadow Impacts
	(Miles)	(Number)	(L,M, or H)	(L,M, or H)
No-Build	0	0	LOW	LOW
Modal				
Sacramento to Stockton	0	0	LOW	LOW
Stockton to Modesto	0	0	LOW	LOW
Modesto to Merced	0	0	LOW	LOW
Merced to Fresno	0	0	LOW	LOW
Fresno to Tulare	0	0	LOW	LOW
Tulare to Bakersfield	0	0	LOW	LOW
HST Corridor & Station Options (2)				
Sacramento to Stockton				
Alignments				
A1	2.6	0	LOW	LOW
A2	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
A3	2.3	0	LOW	LOW
A4	0.8	0	LOW	LOW
A5	2.3	0	LOW	LOW
A6	0.3	0	LOW	LOW
A7	2	0	LOW	LOW
A8	0	0	LOW	None
Stations				
Sacramento Downtown Depot	0	0	LOW	LOW
Power Inn Road Station (BNSF Option)	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Power Inn Road Station (UPRR Option)	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Stockton ACE Downtown Station	0	0	HIGH	HIGH
Maintenance Facilities				
Sacramento Maintenance Facility BNSF Alt	0	0	LOW	LOW
Sacramento Maintenance Facility UPRR Alt	0	0	LOW	LOW
Stockton to Modesto				
Alignments				
B1	1.7	0	LOW	LOW
B2	3	0	LOW	LOW
Stations				
Modesto Downtown Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW

	Scenic Corridors (1) Impacted (Miles)	Scenic Viewing Points/Overlooks Within 1/4 Mile (Number)	High Contrast Impacts (L,M, or H)	Shadow Impacts (L,M, or H)
Modesto Briggsmore Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Modesto to Merced				
C2	0	0	LOW	None
C3	0	0	LOW	None
C4	0	0	LOW	None
C5	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
C6	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
C7	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
C8	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
C9	0	0	LOW	None
C10	0	0	LOW	None
C11	0.8	0	LOW	LOW
C12	0.8	0	LOW	LOW
C13	0.8	0	LOW	LOW
C14	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
C15	0.8	0	LOW	LOW
C16	1.1	0	LOW	LOW
Stations				
Merced Downtown Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Merced Municipal Airport Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Castle Air Force Base Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Merced to Fresno				
Alignments				
D1	0	0	LOW	None
D2	0	0	LOW	None
D3	0	0	LOW	None
D4	0	0	LOW	None
D5	0	0	LOW	None
D6	0	0	LOW	None
D7	0	0	LOW	None
D8	0	0	LOW	None
Stations				
Fresno Downtown Station	0	0	LOW	MED
Fresno to Tulare				
Alignments				
E1	0.9	0	LOW	LOW
E2	0	0	LOW	None

	Scenic Corridors (1) Impacted (Miles)	Scenic Viewing Points/Overlooks Within 1/4 Mile (Number)	High Contrast Impacts (L,M, or H)	Shadow Impacts (L,M, or H)
Stations				
Visalia Airport Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Hanford Station	0	0	MED	LOW
Tulare to Bakersfield				
Alignments				
F1		0	LOW	None
F2	0	0	LOW	None
F3	0	0	LOW	None
F4	0	0	LOW	None
F5	0	0	LOW	None
F6	0	0	LOW	None
F7	0	0	LOW	None
F8	0	0	LOW	None
F9	0	0	LOW	None
F10	0	0	LOW	None
F11	0	0	LOW	None
F12	0	0	LOW	None
F13	0	0	LOW	None
F14	0	0	LOW	None
F15	0	0	LOW	None
F16	0	0	LOW	None
F17	0	0	LOW	None
F18	0	0	LOW	None
F19	0	0	LOW	None
F20	0	0	LOW	None
F21	0	0	LOW	None
F22	0	0	LOW	None
F23	0	0	LOW	None
F24	0	0	LOW	None
Stations				
Bakersfield Airport Station	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Golden State Station	0	0	MED	LOW
Truxtun (Union Avenue) Station	0	0	LOW	LOW
Truxtun (Amtrak) Station	0	0	LOW	LOW
Maintenance Facilities				
Main Maintenance Facility BNSF Alt	0	0	HIGH	LOW
Main Maintenance Facility UPRR Alt	0	0	HIGH	LOW

(1) Scenic Corridors includes designated scenic highways as well as scenic rivers.

(2) The HST alignment options for each of the six corridors making up the Sacramento to Bakersfield region are described in Appendix A.

Figure 16
Plan and Profile for 4 Track Aerial Station, Bakersfield Truxtun Station

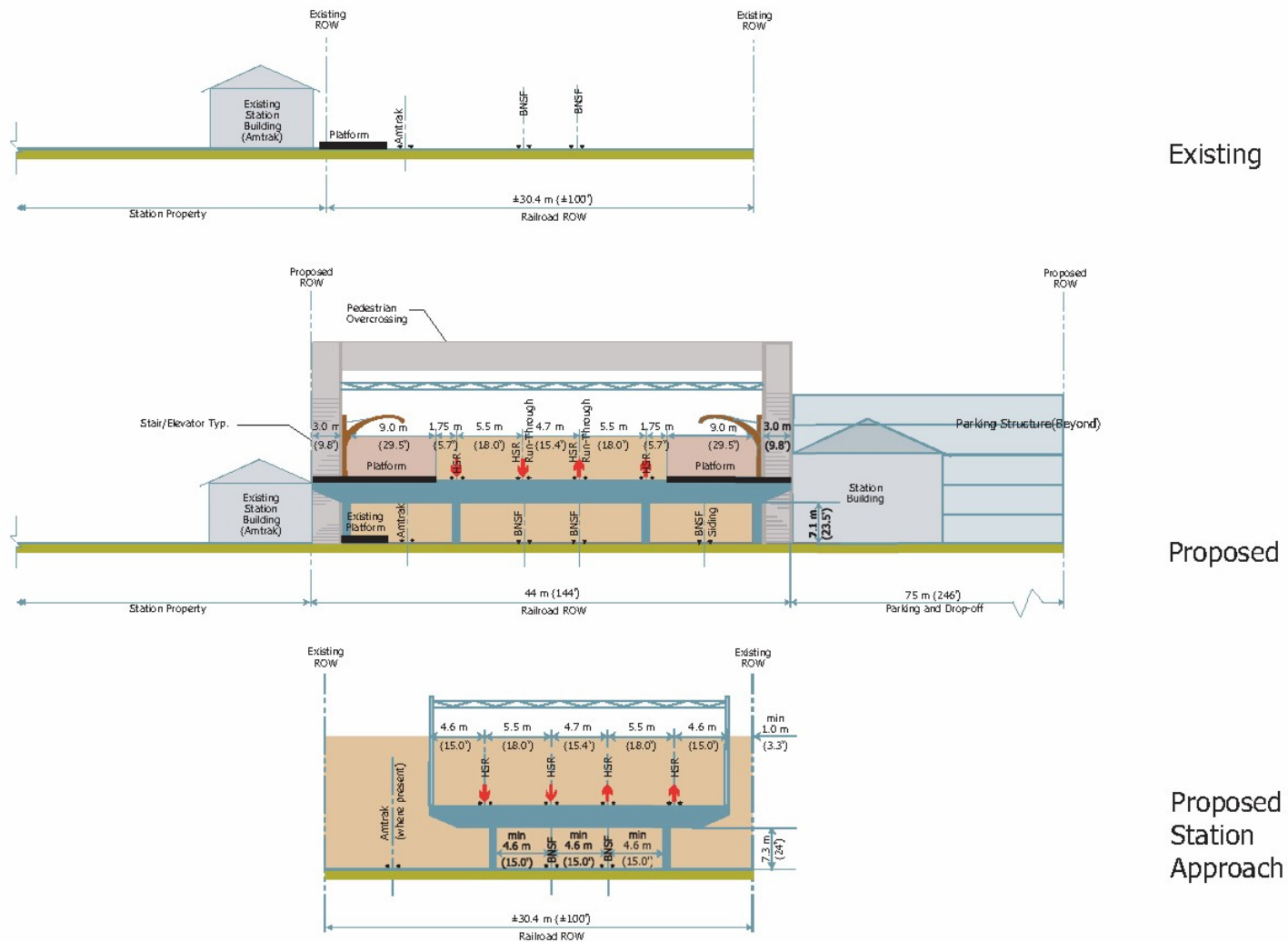


Figure 17
Representative Station in Urban Typology at Existing Station Site



Figure 18 shows the elevation for the proposed station at Fresno. The existing setting in Fresno is shown in Figure 8 earlier. In general, the existing area consists of multiple UPRR and BNSF rail lines. The new stations would generally be about 40 to 50 feet tall. Pedestrian overcrossings allowing pedestrians to access either side of the tracks would be about 40 feet tall (about 4 stories high). New parking structures would also be constructed in the station area. The width of the new rail lines would be about 125 feet wide. The rail lines on the northerly approach would have a clearance of about 24 feet and would be about 75 feet tall (7-8 stories high). The new station and facilities would be highly visible in this setting. However, due to the lack of coherence of the existing setting (differing building sizes, heights and condition), and lack of sensitive receptors (i.e., viewers in the area), impacts related to aesthetics and visual resources are likely to be minimal.

Rural Impacts

Rural land uses predominate throughout the Sacramento to Bakersfield region. In general, it is not expected that impacts related to aesthetics and visual resources would result from implementation of the proposed project through these rural areas. For example, construction of new rail lines for the HST Alternative would occur almost entirely at grade and would not be noticeable to the average traveler or resident (impacts related to loss of agricultural land are evaluated separately). In cases, where the alignment would be elevated, it would occur over limited stretches, primarily to clear a waterway. Construction of a new station would likely create a new "landmark," which would be visible for substantial distance in each direction. However, while the structure and facilities would be imposing against the level farmlands, the new station would not likely represent a loss of scenic resources or scenic vista because of the abundance of agricultural vistas throughout the Sacramento to Bakersfield region. Therefore, the following three views of rural vistas were selected for their features: light industrial, orchard and roadway, and residential. These features could be affected by implementation of the project.

Light Industrial Impacts: Figure 19 illustrates the potential station at Power Inn Road. Previously, Figure 10 presented the existing conditions at this location. Where only rail lines exist, the project would construct a new station and parking structure about 60 feet in height. Pedestrian overcrossings allowing pedestrians to access either side of the tracks would be about 40 feet tall (about 4 stories high). The width of the new rail lines would be about double the width of existing lines. The new station and facilities would be highly visible in this setting. However, similar to other industrial areas and open areas, due to the presence of a open land background that is lacking in visual variation and the lack of sensitive receptors (i.e., viewers in the area), impacts related to aesthetics and visual resources are likely to be minimal.

Orchard and Roadway Impacts: Figure 12, presented previously, shows orchard trees of about 12-17 feet, an access road, fencing, open field, utility lines and poles, and SR 99. With construction of the project, it is likely that visual conflicts with existing uses would occur, requiring relocation of utility lines, loss of orchards or agriculture, or aerial construction of rail lines. Loss of orchards or installation of elevated rail lines could result in loss or disruption of visual resources. It is difficult to assess the level of impact at this time; however, the level of impact would be related to the amount or length of disrupted area.

Residential Impacts: Isolated residential uses (i.e., rural residential) as well as residential communities populate the Sacramento to Bakersfield region. The residents are sensitive receptors, as they would be viewers of the area on a regular basis. Their proximity to the proposed project would affect their level of impact. As shown in Figure 20, only wood plank fencing separates back yards from the open field and roadway. Stations proposed in rural residential areas, as well as rail lines adjacent to rural residential areas could result in visual quality impacts related to lack of compatibility with the design and scale of the existing setting.

Figure 18
Plan and Profile for 4 Track At Grade Station, Fresno Downtown Station

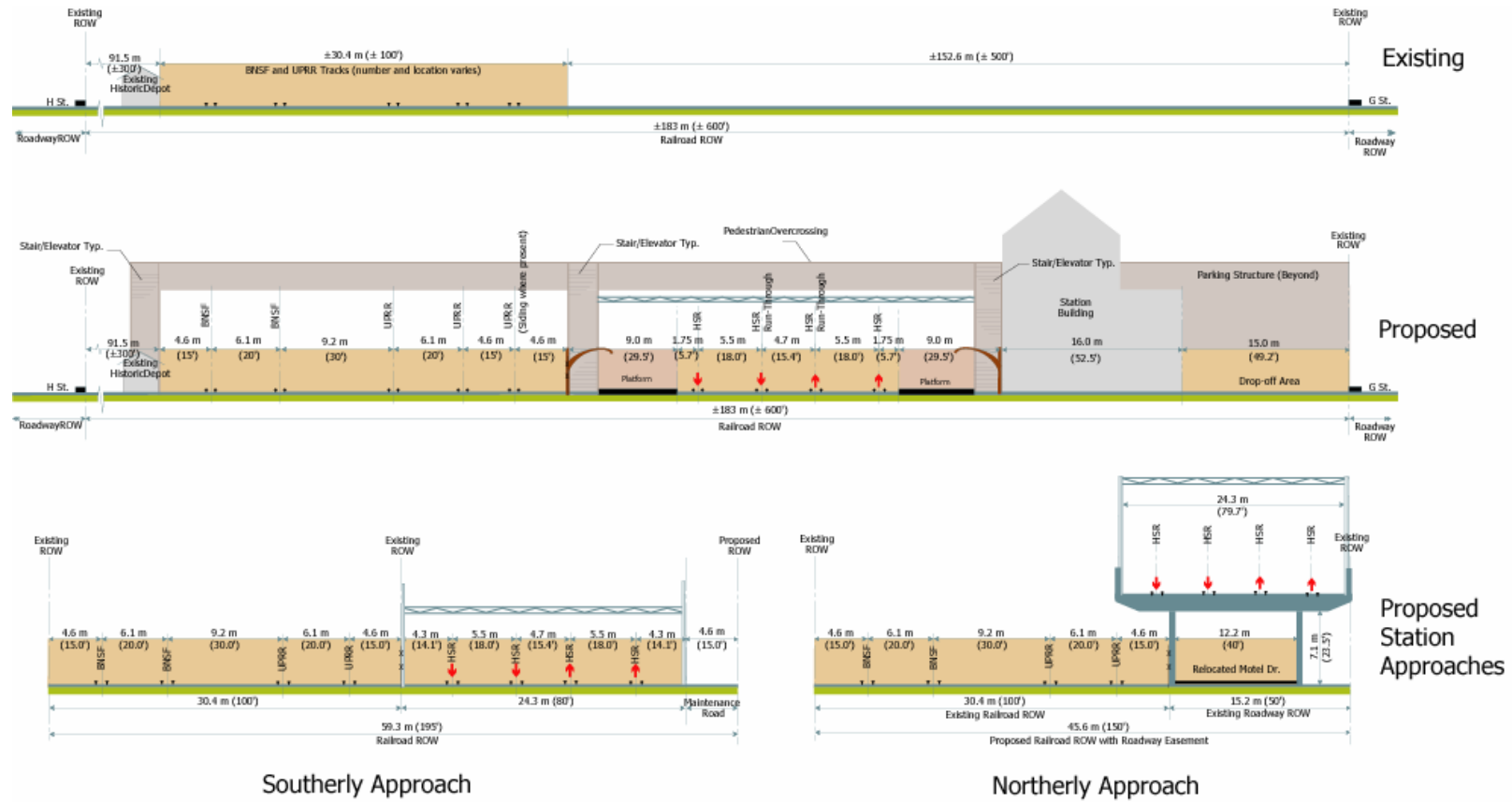


Figure 19
Plan and Profile for 4 Track at Grade Station, Sacramento Power Inn Road Station

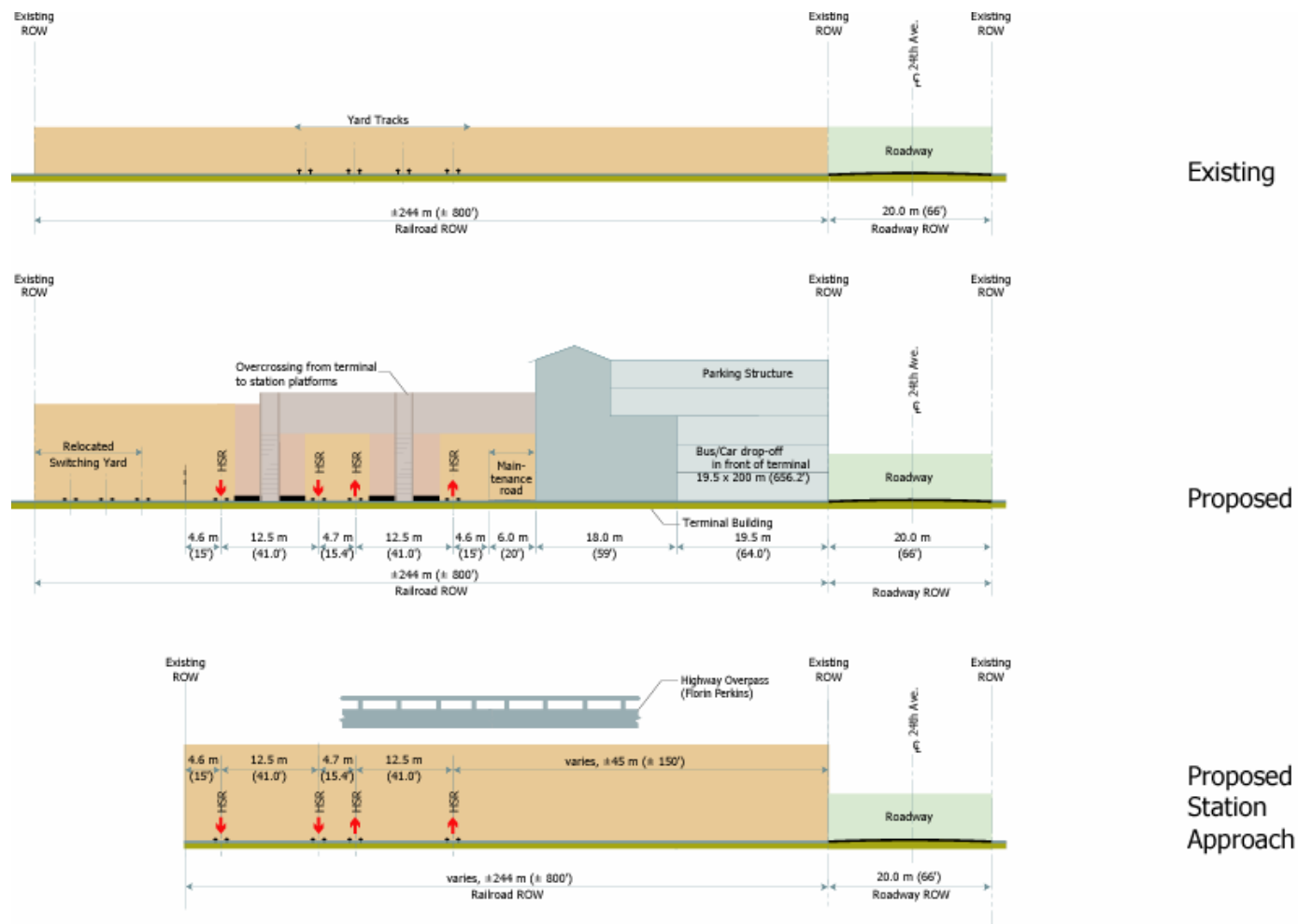


Figure 20
Representative Rail Line in Rural Typology Along Residential Corridor



Vegetated Impacts

Vegetated settings occur wherever the alignment crosses a water feature. Figure 21 presents a wide crossing of a vegetated setting. As shown in Figure 15, the crossings in the Sacramento to Bakersfield region are likely to involve the loss of vegetation within a smaller area. Such isolated crossings would likely affect short-range views, either adjacent to or within the affected area. Since these effects would be noticeable for a short duration (i.e., while crossing the water feature), they are not likely to be substantial. As the loss of vegetation would be evaluated when an alignment is decided, visual impacts related to the loss of vegetation would occur then also.

4.3.2 Views From Scenic Corridors

Designated scenic highways within ¼ mile of the project alignments include Highway 50 in Sacramento, Austin Road and East River Road in San Joaquin County, M and N Streets in Merced, and Route 198 in Visalia. The stretch from Sacramento to Merced and the Fresno to Tulare Corridor would have potential effects on scenic corridors.

In the Sacramento to Stockton Corridor, A1, A3, A5, and A7 (those alignment options along the UP corridor) would potentially affect at least two miles of scenic corridor. In contrast, the alignment options along the BNSF would affect scenic corridors less. Particularly, A2 and A4 would potentially affect about one mile of scenic corridor, and A6 would potentially affect 0.3 mile of scenic corridor. A8 would have no impact.

In the Stockton to Modesto Corridor, B1 along the UP corridor would potentially affect 1.7 miles of scenic corridor, and B2 along the BNSF alignment would potentially affect 3 miles of scenic corridor.

In the Modesto to Merced Corridor, the BNSF alignment options (C5 through C8 and C11 through C16) would potentially affect about 1 mile of scenic corridor. On the other hand, the UP alignment options (C1 through C4, C9 and C10) would have no impact.

In the Merced to Fresno Corridor, no impacts would occur on either the BNSF or UP corridors.

In the Fresno to Tulare Corridor, E1 following the UP route would potentially affect 1 mile of scenic corridor, while E2 following the BNSF route would have no impact.

In the Tulare to Bakersfield Corridor, no impacts would occur.

4.3.3 Views From Scenic Viewing Points/Overlooks

Because the topography in the Sacramento to Bakersfield region is relatively level, there are no scenic viewing points or overlooks within ¼ mile of the project alignment. None of the project alternatives would adversely affect views from scenic viewing points.

4.3.4 High Contrast Impacts

High contrast impacts are related to the relative degree of difference between the existing environment and the new facilities. These impacts would not be expected to occur along the corridors in the Sacramento to Bakersfield region, because the rail lines would be at-grade and would parallel existing rail lines in most instances. In some cases, the rail lines would be elevated to cross streams or roadways. Where the rail lines cross streams, the elevated rail lines would resemble other rail crossings in the vicinity and would add to an existing feature (and not represent a new feature). Where the rail lines

Figure 21
Representative Crossing in Vegetated Area Typology



cross roadways, the elevated rail lines would resemble a highway interchange or overpass, and again would add to an existing feature.

High contrast impacts have been identified in several instances: where stations would be constructed in open fields and where stations would more than double the size of existing facilities and would be noticeable. The construction of stations in open fields would provide “high contrast” compared to the uniform topography of the primarily agricultural landscape. However, this would not necessarily represent a significant visual impact because: viewers of the station, primarily drivers, would notice the station for a limited amount of time; contrast with uniform topography can be a pleasant visual experience as these stations would represent new landmarks; and the ubiquitous nature of the agricultural landscape makes its diminishment of agricultural topography for a station not as noticeable as it would be in other locations. The greatest visual impact would result from establishing stations in existing station locations that have a historic or small-town feel that the new stations would overwhelm. In these instances, the new stations would replace the existing visual setting.

No impacts along the alignment corridor from widening of the rail right-of-way have been identified since the entire alignment is level with no topographical variation, and the widening would not be noticeable.

4.3.5 Shadow Effects

Shadow impacts would be related to the shading of public areas, including parks and other public meeting areas, and trails. Shadow impacts have been identified where stations may conflict with existing sensitive surroundings (i.e., residential use, park use, trail use). These uses were identified in the Sections 4(f) and 6(f) technical evaluation. In addition, the corridor could experience shading impacts where the rail lines cross streams.

4.3.6 Effects from Light And Glare

Standard station features include a terminal building, parking structure, pedestrian overcrossing, at-grade and elevated platforms, and multiple rail lines. None of the materials proposed for the stations would be expected to cause or intensify any light or glare. It is possible that additional lighting features would be added to the station area in final design. As these lighting features are unknown until designed, they could potentially create a new source of light and glare.

4.3.7 Maintenance Facilities

Impacts of the maintenance facility options would be comparable to one another (i.e., in both Sacramento and Bakersfield, there is a general lack of sensitivity of the area). In Sacramento these facilities would have no effect, and in Bakersfield these facilities would present a high contrast compared to existing features and would still have no effect).

5.0 REFERENCES

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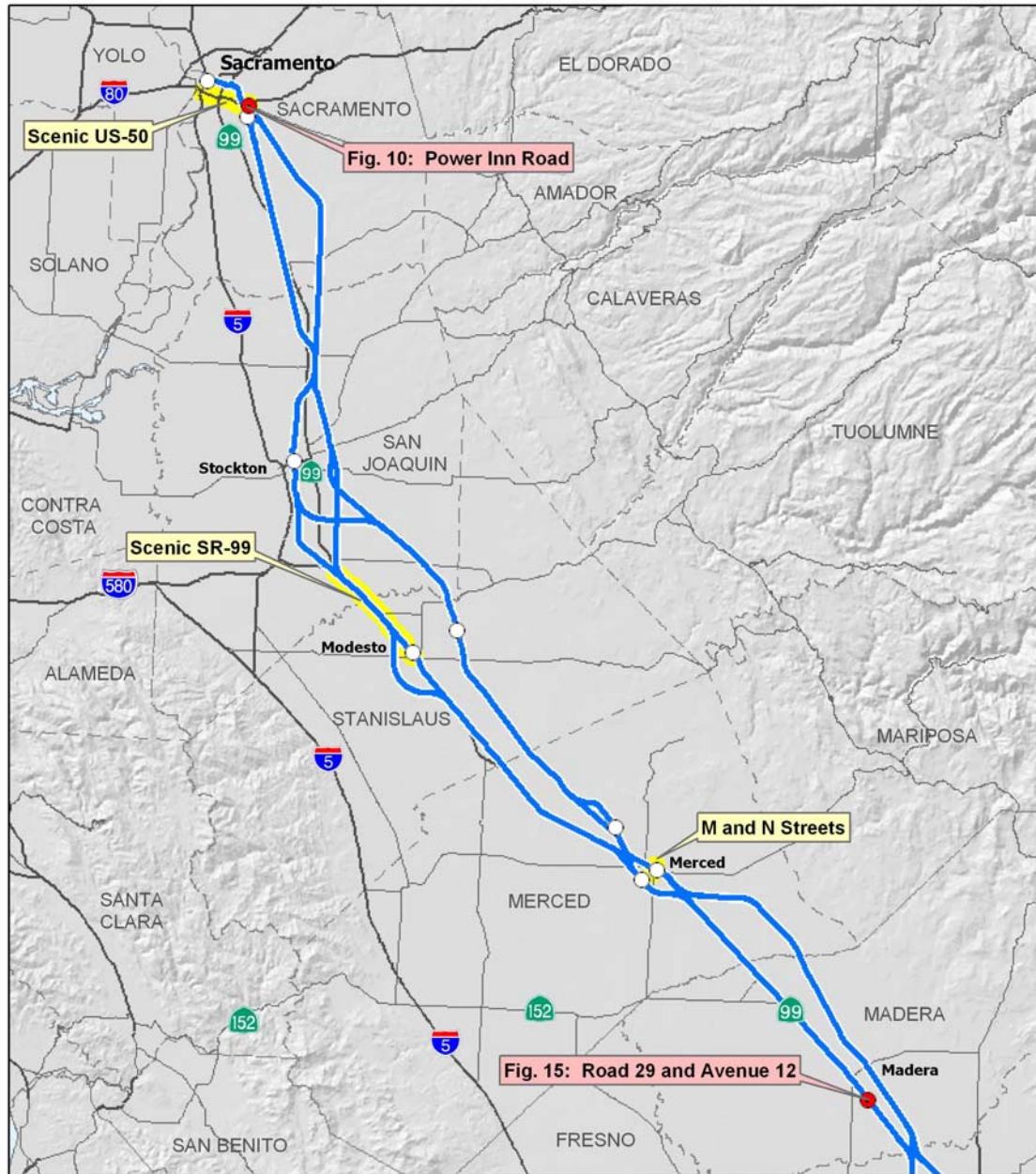
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX – A

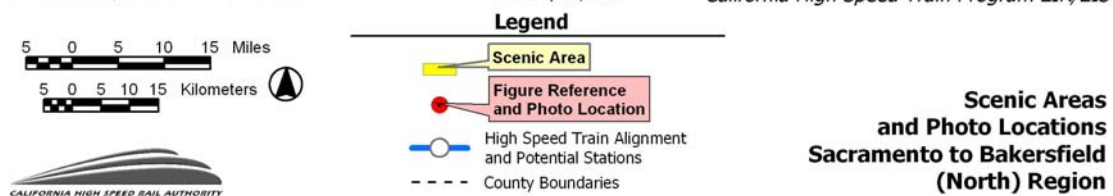
APPENDIX A - VIEWPOINT LOCATION MAPS

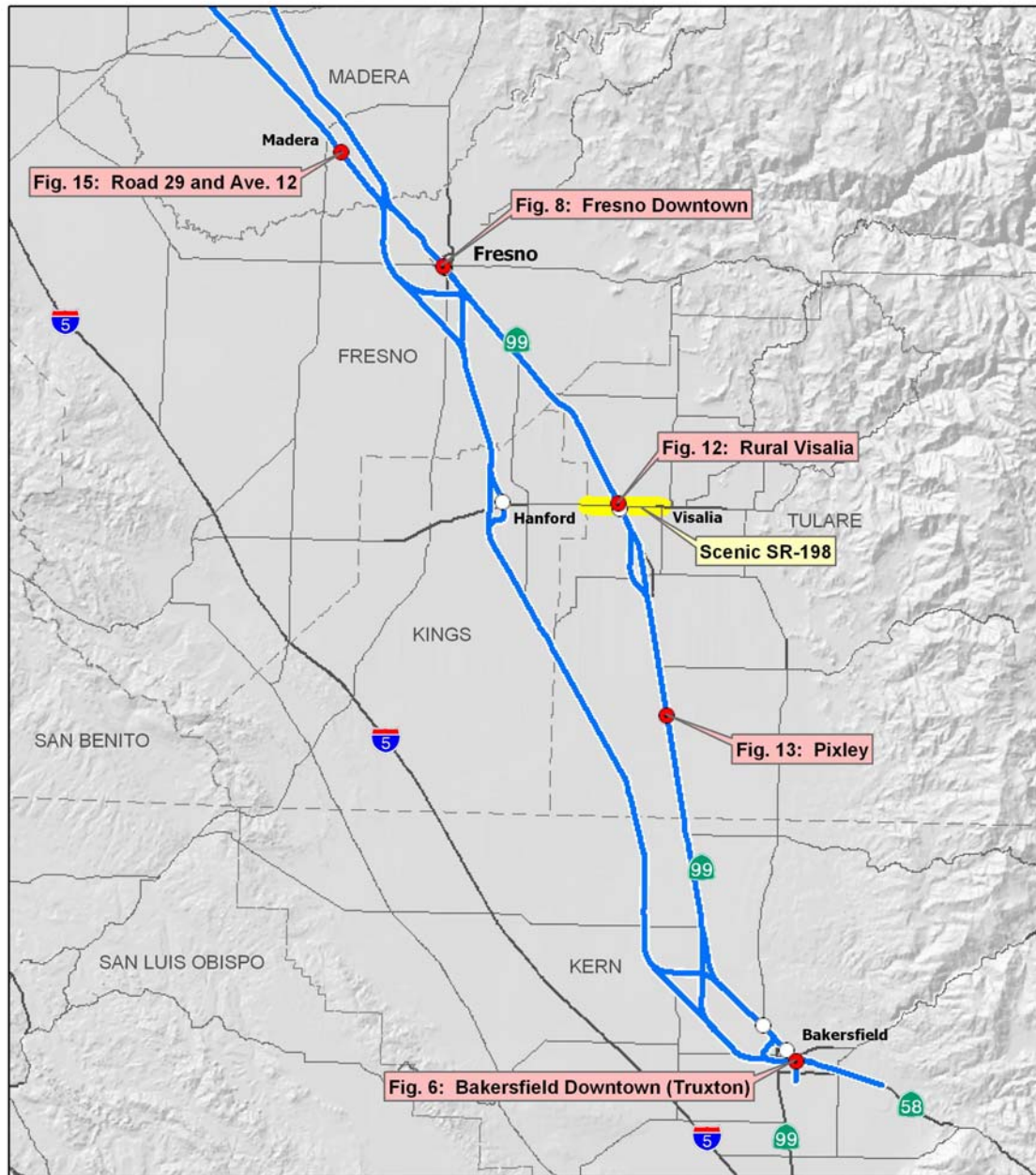


Source: CA Dept. of Fish and Game 1999

January 30, 2004

California High Speed Train Program EIR/EIS





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